



David Duplisea, executive director of the Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce, says COVID-19 could have a harsh effect on food and hospitality businesses in the city.

Photo: Telegraph-Journal archive

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Sean Mott | Telegraph-Journal

David Duplisea is watching the coronavirus updates very closely.

Duplisea, the CEO of the Saint John Chamber of Commerce, said his group is monitoring COVID-19 and its impact on the Saint John business community.

"We're hearing a lot of concern from businesses," he said. "It's a difficult situation. Supply chains are being interrupted."

The Chamber is taking preventative measures as the COVID-19 problem grows. They've postponed several face-to-face meetings this month, including a luncheon with Premier Blaine Higgs and an information session on immigration for employers.

Duplisea said people self-isolating and avoiding in-person contact can have a big impact on businesses, particularly ones that rely on human interactions.

"Social distancing affects retail and hospitality," he said. "The people on the front lines are most affected."

Duplisea said his Chamber, working with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, is focused on informing businesses and the public about the risks associated with COVID-19.

"We don't want to spread fear," he said.

Duplisea said public safety is key and going forward everyone needs to find the balance between maintaining public health and support local businesses.

"There are other ways to have non-face-to-face meetings [with businesses]," he said. "Continue to try to support local businesses if you can because they need it more than ever."

Arena closures

Arenas and rinks in Saint John have closed until further notice due to COVID-19 concerns.

All City-operated arenas, which include the Charles Gorman, Hilton Belyea, Stewart Hurley, and Peter Murray were officially closed at 6 p.m. on Sunday. The Lord Beaverbrook Rink also announced its temporary closure starting Sunday.

The TD Station has suspended all ice rentals for the time being, although its box office and administration remain open.

Punch Lines keeping the laughs going

COVID-19 might have put a pause on the jokes at Punch Lines over the weekend, but the comedy club plans to keep the laughs going in the future.

Punch Lines co-owner Julie Tower said their headline act for March 13 and 14, Angelo Tsarouchas, had to cancel his shows at the comedy club due to travel concerns. Tsarouchas took a plane ride home to be with his family over concerns with travel restrictions.

"He didn't want to risk getting stuck in New Brunswick," Tower said.

Tower noted their venue never exceeds a capacity of 150 people, which is the limit of recommended public gatherings during the pandemic, so they have no plans at the moment to cancel future shows. She said they disinfect the space after every show and their upcoming slate of comedians are mostly based in Canada, so concerns over travel aren't as pressing as with international talent.

"Angelo [Tsarouchas] is our first show that was affected by [coronavirus]," Tower said.

Loch Lomond Villa closed to visitors

The Loch Lomond Villa nursing home is closing its doors to visitors.

In a press release, Cindy Donovan, CEO, said the closure is being implemented to keep residents and staff healthy, as well as to ensure supply management.

Family members designated as "next-of-kin" can call 506-643-7175 to check in on their loved ones.

The measures will be in place until further notice.

Saint John Airport asks drivers to wait in cars

If you're dropping someone off or picking them up at the Saint John airport, you'll be encouraged to wait in your vehicle.

In a Facebook post, the Saint John Airport asked drivers who are bringing travellers to departures or meeting them at arrivals to stay in their vehicles instead of entering the terminal in an effort to avoid exposure to COVID-19.

The post said the airport will waive short-term parking fees until March 31.

New Brunswick Museum closes doors

Following the announcement on Friday that all national Canadian museums would be closed for the foreseeable future due to COVID-19, the New Brunswick Museum said it would do the same.

In a statement on Saturday, the museum announced it would be closed to the public starting that day. The closure includes the Market Square Exhibition Centre and the Douglas Avenue Collections and Research Centre.

The museum anticipates the closure will last until at least March 30, although it will be reassessed on an ongoing basis.

Justice on hold

Jury trials in Saint John and across New Brunswick are postponed until May.

According to a press release from Justice and Office of the Attorney General, the Court of Queen's Bench is adjourned until May 12 due to COVID-19.

“The Chief Justice has made this decision in the interest of public health following consultations with the province’s chief medical officer of health,” said Justice Minister and Attorney General Andrea Anderson-Mason in the press release. “The government supports this decision as we believe this step supports the goal of slowing or preventing the spread of COVID-19.”

McAllister Place hours change

McAllister Place mall is changing its weekly hours to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Starting Monday, the mall's hours of operations will change to 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. from Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday, and 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

The mall has already temporarily removed food court trays and high chairs and suspended the use of McAllister Place strollers, wheelchairs, walkers and shopping caddies at Guest Services.

Plays change venues

COVID-19 hasn't brought down the curtains on the Saint John Theatre Company, but they are readjusting upcoming plays.

The company's production of *Driving Miss Daisy* was set to run in the Imperial Theatre from March 25 to 28, but due to government recommendations discouraging public gatherings of more than 90 people, the play is moving to the 90-seat BMO Studio Theatre on Princess Street.

The play is set to run in late March, but the exact dates have yet to be announced. Ticket sales are currently on hold.

Productions of *The Wolves* and *Mary Poppins* were scheduled to go onstage in May, but they have been moved to the fall.

Moores offers full refunds

As prom season draws closer, Moores is offering flexibility with its rental orders.

In a press release, CEO Dinesh Lathi said if someone has placed an order with the company and their event is cancelled due to COVID-19, Moores will offer a choice of a gift card for the full amount along with an additional 20 per cent discount on any order, or simply a full refund.

If an event is postponed, Moores will maintain order details and measurements.

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